

The Red Lady

A Fascinating New
Mystery Romance

by
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"I must—" I began, but that cold steel grip on my wrist coerced me."

CHAPTER I. How I Came to The Pines.

IT is the discomfort of the thing which comes back upon me, I believe, most forcibly. It was most horrible, too, emphatically horrible, but the prolonged, sustained, baffling discomfort of my position is what has left the mark. The growing suspicion, the uncanny circumstances, my long knowledge of that presence—it is all extraordinary, not least the part I somehow managed to play.

I was housekeeper at the time for little Mrs. Brane. How I had come to be her housekeeper might have served to forewarn me, with no other clue. None but an inexperienced, desperate girl would have taken the position after the fashion in which I was urged to take it.

I remember the raw, colorless day and how it made me shiver to face its bitter grayness as I came out of the dismal New York boarding house to begin my dreary, mortifying search for work. I remember the hollowness of purse and stomach

and the dullness of head. I even remember wondering that hair like mine, so flamingly, conspicuously golden red, could possibly keep its flame under such conditions. And half way down the block, how very well I remember the decent looking, black-clad woman who touched my arm, looked me hard in the face and said, "A message for you, madam."

She got away so quickly that I hadn't opened the blank envelope before she was round the corner and out of my sight.

The envelope contained a slip of white paper, on which was neatly printed in pen and ink: "Excellent position vacant at The Pines, Pine Cone, N. C. Mrs. Theodore Brane wants housekeeper. Apply at once."

This was not signed at all. I thought "Some one is thinking kindly of me, after all. Some oldtime friend of my father's, perhaps, has sent a servant to me with this message." I re-

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